

NOTES ON NAMAQUALAND BUSHMEN.

By Miss L. CURRLÉ.

(With Additional Notes by L. PÉRINGUEY, F.R.S.S.Af.)

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The following was told me by one of our most progressive farmers—a gentleman whose veracity is above suspicion, and whose early life afforded him ample facilities for obtaining a clear insight into the characteristics of these people :—

The Bushmen consist of wandering tribes, different branches using different languages; they habitually move about after game, on which they live by preference; and when game is not procurable they live on roots and such things as mice and beetles, lizards, eggs, and white ants, called “rijs miere” (rice ants) by the Dutch people. The nests of these ants (termites) are underground and the Bushwomen are specially clever at finding these nests; they discover them by throwing down a stick which gives a hollow sound just above such a nest (*I*). This stick is from 3 to 4 feet long. To the one end is fastened the horn of a male springbuck (antelope), which has been straightened by warming in the fire; in the middle of the stick is a round stone weighing from 5 to 6 lbs. with a hole through it (the ! *Kwè*), giving weight to the stick and making it more effective. The upper end of the stick is a little thinner than the lower part, to allow the stone to rest securely midway. This is the only implement the women have except the upper part of a tortoise-shell, which they use as a drinking vessel. An empty ostrich egg, corked by a plug of grass, is utilised for a water-bottle; this shell is carried on their back in a skin when they go a long distance to hunt for white ants and roots—this being specially the women’s contribution towards the menu.

The women’s dress consists of a skin fastened round the waist. Sometimes they wear round the neck a string of ornaments made from the shell of an ostrich egg, and decorate their woolly hair by stretching out

the curls 2 or 3 inches in length, and fastening to them with their own hair little bits of stone and bone shaped according to their own fancy. They shape these stones and bones by rubbing them on another stone. The women are very fond of painting their faces with a certain kind of stone which they find in certain localities—no doubt hematite; they powder this on a flat stone by means of a round pounder or pestle about 3 inches in diameter. Another paint—a most favourite one with the Bushmen—is derived from a species of mushroom which grows in the shade under trees and bushes in Fraserburg and Calvinia districts, and called by them “Ajous”; it contains a fine red powder which they mix with the fat of an animal. Preferably ostrich fat is used by them for painting on rocks with this ajous powder, as this special fat is said to cause the paint to become lasting and hard, imparting with age a dark brownish colour similar to enamel.

The men use only bows and arrows (2). The string of the bow is made out of the sinews of some animal; the favourite stick for the bow is of a certain thickness and is taken from the Karree-tree (*Rhus sp.*). They thin the ends of the stick with a flint stone which is used instead of a knife; these flints are also used when slaughtering an animal and cutting up the flesh. The bows are also used as musical instruments; the Bushmen sit on the ground with crossed legs, put the one end of the bow against the right shoulder, and the other between their feet, and then strike the end of the bow with their forefingers. Their musical faculty consists in imitating most cleverly the sounds made by running animals, as animals are foremost in their thoughts and nature; they imitate the galloping, trotting, and cantering of a horse so perfectly that one imagines he hears the animal. They imitate the sounds made by the feet of the hare when running, preferably to all other sounds. They go out for long distances hunting for game, carrying their store of water in the cleaned stomach of a springbuck. When they go out for this purpose they generally go in parties. If their hunt is successful, they send messengers back to the waiting families ordering them to proceed to the hunting-ground; the trek is an easy matter, for the Bushmen possess no domestic animals, and they build no permanent huts. They live and feed on the meat as long as it lasts. When they have plenty of food they sleep during the day and dance through the night.

The following incident will illustrate some of their cunning, wanton cruelty, and wastefulness. In the district of Calvinia some Bushmen watched a herd of springbuck numbering from 5,000 to 6,000, feeding on a plateau which rose gradually on one side and ended in a steep precipice on the other. They drove the springbuck towards the precipice and wounded the one nearest the edge. The poor animal jumped to inevitable death and the rest followed, being driven on by the Bushmen

in wild exultation. Word was sent far and wide to all and a great feast and dance was held. The fall of the animals produced a deep depression in the ground and could still be seen years afterwards, together with great heaps of the bleached bones of the unfortunate springbuck.

The Bushman roasts or boils all flesh before eating, roasting a hare whole—skin and all—under the coals and hot ash. They eat all kinds of animals—the hyæna, jackal, leopard, all buck and wild beasts; they do not disdain the crawling worm.

They never build any proper huts, only making a slight shelter of grass and twigs. When staying any length of time at a place they prefer to be on the low-lying hills, right in amongst the stones, where they are invisible, but from whence they can obtain a good view of the game grazing in the plains. They sometimes sit for hours—even days—watching and making plans to waylay the quarry, which they do as the game moves past into the hills. Sometimes they divide, one party approaching the animals, the other going a circular way, driving them towards the first who, when sufficiently near, use their bows and arrows.

They are wonderfully cunning in their methods. Occasionally they will creep up to an antelope or a hare flat on their stomach; they will tie a bundle of grass or a bush on their head so as to be unnoticed by the antelope. If it is a big animal, like the gemsbuck, for instance, they shoot it with a long poisoned arrow, and when the wounded animal runs away they patiently track it, showing remarkable skill in the pursuit. They never lose the tracks (spoor) of an animal, knowing that it will drop sooner or later from the effects of the poison. When it is found dead they wait a little while for the carcass to get cold, by which time it is supposed that the poison has found its way back to the place where the animal was wounded. Then they cut out the flesh surrounding the wound, so as to remove all the poison, after which process they eat the remaining meat with safety.

The poison for the arrows is obtained from different substances; snake poison is used, also that taken from a most deadly large spider called “baviaan’s spinekop” (3); they also use the milky juice taken from a species of *Euphorbia* called “Boomgift” in Dutch, and which grows in the Langebergen.

They do not use any medicinal plants for ailments; they practise witchcraft to remove illness. The old women are called to attend a patient, and are supposed to remove the owl or wild cat or some such evil thing which is causing the pain by snorting round the patient—especially round the seat of pain.

The Bushmen keep no stock, or domestic animals; they never cultivate anything; they are not a warlike race; they acknowledge no chief or leader, but wander about in groups. They have no marriage customs,

but they do not indulge in polygamy, being constant to one wife. If they should tire of her they might do away with her and take another.

Even in dry seasons, when great privations are endured, they have never been known to practise cannibalism.

They have a weird custom concerning the aged amongst them. When the latter can no longer follow the clan, which is constantly moving after the game, the younger men make a small kraal of thorny bushes and put the aged into this, together with a supply of food. When this is consumed they die of starvation, as the party has moved away. The thorny shrubs are supposed to prevent wild animals from devouring them.

Bushmen are very revengeful; when once they have a grudge against any one they never forget it, but wait patiently for their revenge. They never surrender; when driven into a corner they fight to the death (4); they are loyal to a master when attached—loyal unto death. In some cases they will kill their own relatives if necessary. This they can do in the coolest way, as the following illustration will show. "Droog Klaas" was a lazy Bushman who would not work, and who lived by stealing the stock herded by his relations for white masters. These herds got into trouble about missing stock, so they formulated a plan for the thief's destruction, finally inviting him to a daga smoke (wild hemp), this weed having the property of rendering its smokers quite senseless. Droog Klaas was very strong, so they cautiously asked him to wrestle after a while to try his strength; then as he still retained his strength, they persuaded him to smoke more daga, and when fully drunk they caught him by the hands and feet and one of the party calmly cut his throat.

"Janetje," an old girl long in the employment of the narrator's father, was of a mild disposition, and always respectful towards even the younger children, always calling them "Bassie" and "Nonnie," but to illustrate the inborn revengefulness of the Bushman nature, this true account of her actions is given, as told by her own sons to the narrator: Bushmen once stole some stock which were herded by Janetje's husband, "Zwaart-Piet" by name, and their sons, "Platje" and "Klaas." A hunt was organised to kill the thieves. Zwaart-Piet had an old-fashioned muzzle-loader. He was rather reckless, and went near the hole in which the Bushmen had taken refuge. Unfortunately, his gun would not go off, so while bending down to examine the cause of his failure, he was shot with a poisoned arrow and dropped dead. Years later a young Bushman came to Janetje's kraal, saying that he had been captured by a white man, had escaped, and was going to tell his people where the white man's cattle was grazing, so that they could come and steal them. By dint of questioning Janetje found out that he was the nephew of the man who shot her husband. Cautioning her people to let her alone and do as she pleased, she picked up a knobkerrie (club), and, passing close to where the young stranger sat chatting

near the fire, suddenly she hit him on the one ear with such force that the blood shot out of the other ear. She then battered his head so that the brains came out, adding, "Throw him to the aasvogels (vultures) so that they can eat him. I am satisfied. I have had revenge of my husband."

Bushman children have no set games. They imitate their elders in the use of the bow and arrow, shooting birds, mice, and lizards, which they roast and eat. They hunt for lizard eggs, which they find in holes in the ground, and gobble the contents. They imitate the sounds made by animals, but never play any game like other children. They will also try to straighten the reeds (which they use for arrows) by means of a stone implement heated in the fire (5). This stone is long and flat in shape, and has a central groove running through the whole length, into which the reed is pressed with stones, thus straightening the reed in an effectual way.

The Bushmen believe that they will rise again after death, and for this reason they bury their dead in a sitting position, so as to enable them to get up easily and walk to a certain mountainous place near the lower part of the Orange River, called by them "Koegas," where there is supposed to be plenty of wild honey and locusts. Those who have been quarrelsome and have behaved badly in their lifetime towards their friends will have common flies (house flies) to eat as a punishment for their bad behaviour; the good and favoured ones have wild honey and locust porridge to eat—doubtless two highly appreciated delicacies.

Bushmen are very superstitious. In the evening they never talk about any dangerous wild animals such as lions and leopards, because doing so would be taken for a bad omen, and these animals would come and eat them during the night.

The Bushmen believe that the vermin—jackals, wild cats, and like animals, even lions—were formerly some kind of human beings, and were transformed by witchcraft into wild animals; this was their punishment for some bad act done by them once upon a time. These beliefs have been handed down for generations—perhaps centuries—from father to son. They believe that there was in the early days an evil person or devil who always quarrelled with the others, and was always trying to pick a quarrel for the slightest reason. One day this evil person or devil went out into the veld. He met a wild cat who was quietly walking about by himself hunting for game, and who, whilst so doing, had a habit of calling a certain name, "No'can no'chabd."* As soon as the devil heard him call that name, he said, "Oh, that is why my brother is so sickly, because you are always using this name in vain. How dare you do that?"

* The name is, of course, reproduced here phonetically.

The cat took no notice of this, going on using the same name, so the devil got into a passion, walked up to the cat, and aimed a heavy blow at him. The cat very dexterously avoided it by quickly burying its head under the sand, and so the devil struck only the sand.

The cat then jumped out quickly and dealt him a heavy blow before he was ready. The devil recovered and aimed another heavy blow at the cat, but, as before, this was avoided by the cat again burying his head in the sand, and, as before, he jumped out quickly and dealt the devil another blow. This was repeated several times until at last the devil had to run away. When he stopped to fight, the devil put down his quiver with arrows and also his bow, which he had no time to pick up when he ran away, but he possessed the power of calling these things to follow him.

When the devil went out another time he found the meercats following the spoor of a wounded eland which had been wounded by one of the meercats with a poisoned arrow; the devil said in a very contemptuous way, "What funny people they are, such insignificant-looking people, so small in stature!"

He spoke thus in order to provoke their anger, and to pick a quarrel with them, but the meercats took no notice of all this. They quietly followed the eland's spoor. As the devil could not make them angry, he went and pushed the leader off the spoor and followed the spoor himself, but the meercat came and pushed him off very violently, and said, "Gar-'argi'-innim", meaning, "I am a big man, I carry a beard." but the devil pushed him off again. This was done repeatedly until at last they came to blows. The meercat, being a very clever fighter, soon gained the upper hand; in a short time there was nothing left for the devil but flight. The meercats then followed up the spoor of the eland peacefully, and captured their game without any further disturbance from the devil." These stories go to show that the Bushmen believe in an evil spirit.

In the above I have endeavoured to portray the nature, superstitions, and customs of the Bushmen living in Little Bushmanland, being now a portion of the Fraserburg, Calvinia, Carnarvon, and Kenhardt districts of the Province of the Cape of Good Hope.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

BY L. PÉRINGUEY.

(1) *The Digging Stick.*

I had lately at the Museum five colonial Bush people—two old men, one old woman, and two youths—from the Carnarvon and Prieska districts, and as purely bred as any to be found at present. After we had gained

their confidence they answered readily diverse questions, the veracity of their answers being tested by repetition of the query at different times, and careful cross-questioning; for it was but too apparent that they were anxious to please. I suggested that they should make me a !*Kwè ka* !! *Kha*, or digging stick. They demurred; they had no stick, no stone, no springbok horn to make one with. But on their being shown a photograph of one such implement found in their own home, and one of their household chattels, and being further provided with what they said they had not, they made one, in the manner mentioned by Miss Currlé. The stick was the walking-stick used by one of the men, but the stone was fixed a little below the middle, not by the thickness of the wood, but by a wooden wedge inserted under the stone, at a part where after trial it was found that the stick was well balanced. The horn-shod point is used slantingly and not vertically in digging. The two men and the women had never heard of the stone and stick being used for detecting the presence of white ants under the ground, but only for opening the ant-hills, and digging out roots and bulbs. As for the !*Kwè* or perforated stones they were occasionally picked by them in the veld. No one with whom they were acquainted, meaning the Bush people, knew how to make these stones. They had been made by people who lived long before their own forbears. They were quite positive of that.

The two youths knew nothing about these !*Kwès*, or their use.

(2) *Bows and Arrows.*

Bows and arrows were of two sizes. The longer bow stands some five feet in length, and its use requires not only great dexterity but also extreme strength. I have it from a farmer in the Carnarvon District that in bending his bow at the fullest "the shoulder-blades of a Bushman could be seen coming together." This is, of course, a metaphoric way of explaining the great strain on the muscles of the arms and back of the Archer.

(3) *Venom of Spider.*

The "babiaans spinekops" are extremely large ground spiders very common in South Africa; but their bite is not "most deadly," in spite of the belief of the country people, although it is extremely painful. The base of the colonial Bush poison is snake venom with the adjunction of the "boomgift," *Amaryllis toxicaria*, or other plants. In the Kalahari the Bush races profess to use the grub of a beetle for the concoction of this poison.

(4) *They never Surrender.*

I am indebted to Mr. W. A. Russell for the following: Mr. —, Calvinia District, told me that one of his earliest recollections was

seeing his father go out with two other Boers to shoot an old Bushman, Piet Jachtpan. The Bushman had entrenched himself in a hole he had dug. The middle Boer advanced, holding a large shield of double oxhide. Under cover of this the other two, one at each side, advanced with their rifles. The Bushman, lying on his back, shot his arrows, using both feet and hands to stretch his bow. Some of his arrows travelled nearly a hundred yards. When they shot him they found he had cut through the skin of his finger-tips with the constant pulling of his bow-string. This Bushman had hit Mr. —'s uncle with one of his poisoned arrows, but it had struck his head through the hair (or hat) and he recovered.

(5) *Heated Stones for straightening Arrow Shafts.*

Small, oftener flat, but sometimes also partly rounded stones with a longitudinal, but always shallow, and very seldom even, groove are considered to have been used for straightening the curve of the reeds used by the Bush people as shafts for their arrows, in the manner mentioned by Miss Currlé. I have already expressed elsewhere great doubts about this alleged process, because of the great unevenness of width, depth, or straightness of the groove, and I gave my reasons for considering them as whetting-stones for bone bodkins, or the reduction into cylindrical shape of the bone shafts tipping the reed-shaft of the arrow. I tested, however, my Bush people in the following manner: A small stone with a very uneven groove was first shown them. Yes, it was intended for straightening the reed; and the simulacre of daintily pressing half an inch of the reed at a time followed. When, however, I pointed out that the groove was neither straight nor deep enough, the old woman interposed by saying contemptuously that the stone I showed them was only a child's toy. Then another implement with a larger, regular, and deeper groove was produced, and evolved great satisfaction. The same explanation followed, but when it was pointed out to them that the texture of the stone, a piece of schist, could not stand the heat of any fire, the only explanation one of the two men could give was that it had first to be scrubbed carefully and then rubbed with springbuk blood, after which process it would stand any fire.

They admitted afterwards that warming before a fire would also permit of the straightening of the reed, just as it had of the lyrate shape of the springbuk horn, and also that they had not straightened arrows themselves, nor had they made any bone. On the other hand, this belief or simulacre of straightening arrow reeds in this manner may be a survival of the custom, with perhaps a symbolic meaning, of times when wooden shafts were straightened in the manner alleged.